

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER'S PROOFS

OR BAD NEWS FOR THE GUILTY



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER

"STAY HERE THEN UNTIL I GO DOWN AND SET THE CLOCK-WORK OF THE INFERNAL MACHINE."

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

CHICK AS A READER OF CHARACTER.

"Chick!"

"At your service, Nick."

"Did you see the young man who just left the house?"

"Yes; I met him in the hall."

"What was the result of your 'bird's-eye' view of him?"

"Well, in the first place, he's handsome and stylish."

"Handsome is as handsome does!"

"Yes, I guess so. This youngster is not bad by nature, if one may judge character by the human face."

"I am glad you agree with me on that point."

"But hold on!" continued Chick. "The young man has also the appearance of being a little 'rapid,' and I should say his life at present does not lie in especially happy lines."

"You noted the look of care on his face?"

"Couldn't help it."

"Well, Chick, you are a very good reader of human character. At least you and I agree pretty well in this instance. But I have the advantage of you because you had to make up your verdict by a mere passing glance, while I had the benefit of a long conversation with the subject and plenty of time to study my man."

So saying, Nick Carter, the great American detective, leaned back in his chair and placidly lighted a cigar.

His assistant waited till the cigar was in "full blast," and then inquired:

"Who is he?"

"His name is George Byron. He is a nephew of Judge Gates, the retired millionaire of Fifth avenue."

"Then he's the old man's heir expectant; Judge Gates has no children of his own."

"He was the heir expectant till a few days ago."

"Disinherited?"

"Yes; pitched overboard, bag and baggage."

"What does he want you to do?"

"That is quite a story, and I'll have to tell it to you later on. Just now I want you to do something for me."

"All right. I'm ready."

"Go down to Bay Ridge; there you'll find anchored a good-sized steam yacht, the 'Merry Mermaid.' You'll find the owner and captain aboard in one and the same person. His name is Rodman."

"Captain Rodman? I've seen him and I know his yacht. She's not exactly a beauty, not new by any means, and rather slow and clumsy, I think. Still, she's a yacht, Nick, and I'd like to own her for a week or two."

Chick's eyes glistened as he expressed the wish.

"Well, maybe you and I will have that satisfaction in partnership. I want you to take a letter from me to Rodman."

"Where is it?"

"I'll write it now."

Thereupon Nick Carter walked over to his desk and rapidly wrote a letter of considerable length. Then he sealed and directed it to "Captain John Rodman, on board the steam yacht Merry Mermaid, at anchor off Bay Ridge."

This done, he silently handed the letter to Chick.

"You're not making a mere messenger out of me, Nick? What am I to do when the letter is delivered?"

"Captain Rodman will probably take you to the engine-room and introduce you to his engineer and the assistant. You'll be, presumably, much interested in the engine and machinery."

"But that is not my mission—to see the engine?"

"Certainly not. A young man who knows

every part of an engine from the largest wheel to the smallest pivot, and is a practical engineer himself, can't be expected to go into ecstasy over the engine of a steam yacht. While you are pretending to study the engine, you will be carefully studying the appearances, voices and manners of the engineer and his assistant."

"To duplicate them?"

"Yes."

"With whom?"

"Yourself and Patsy."

"What's up, Nick? Are we going on a cruise in that yacht?"

"If I can arrange it with Rodman, we are. But you have no time to lose. When you have inspected the Merry Mermaid's engine, come back here to the house at once. It is now five o'clock. You should be back by eight."

"One question, and I'm off: Is this cruise to be made in the interest of George Byron?"

"Partly. I'll tell you all about it, of course, before we go aboard the Merry Mermaid—that is, presuming I can make my deal with Rodman. Now light out."

About nine o'clock on that same evening Nick Carter had a caller who was undoubtedly expected. It was Captain Rodman of the steam yacht Merry Mermaid.

He greeted Nick most cordially.

It was evidently not the first time the two men had met.

"What's in the wind, now, Carter?" asked Rodman, after he had been ushered into the library and made comfortable. "I know you would not have sent for me at this time unless on a matter of important business."

"You are right, Rodman. I want to get the use of your yacht for a week or two."

"When?"

"Right away—to-morrow."

"I'm awfully sorry, old boy, but she's engaged. I'm off on a cruise myself to-morrow."

"I know you have some such an engagement. You are to take Judge Gates' family up the coast, I believe."

"Why, yes. You know this?"

"I was so informed."

"Then in Heaven's name why did you send for me and ask for the yacht yourself?"

"Because I want to go in your place. You know I am almost as good a yachtsman as you are, Rodman."

"That's true. Equally as good. I'd not hesitate a moment on my own account, but I know Gates would not consent."

"I can arrange that."

"I fear it is impossible. Still, I wish it might be so, for my wife wants me to take her on a visit to her sister up about Lake George, and my chief engineer has a very sick child at home, which he feels loath to leave for so long a time. But I know Gates will not consent to let me off."

"Gates need not know that Captain Rodman is not in command."

"What! You would be disguised so thoroughly as to deceive him?"

"Certainly."

"I don't believe it could be done."

"He doesn't know you very well, does he?"

"No. Gates never saw me but two or three times in his life. You might deceive him, but you would have to take Brady and Dunn, the engineers, into your confidence."

"They are in my confidence. Wait a moment."

Nick touched the button of an electric bell. In a few moments the door opened and two men entered.

Rodman sprang to his feet, and a cry of surprise escaped his lips.

"Why, Brady—Dunn! Where did you come from?"

Nick laughed quietly.

"Pretty good disguises, I guess," he chuckled, "if they fool you so well, Captain Rodman."

"You—you don't mean to tell me——"

"Yes, I do, though. These two men whom you mistook for your engineers are my assistants, Chick and Patsy."

After Rodman had stared at the counterfeit engineers of the Merry Mermaid for full fifteen seconds, Nick gave his assistants a signal, and they withdrew without saying a word.

Finally Rodman turned to Nick, and with a look of perplexity plainly fixed on his face, asked:

"Will you tell me your object in disguising your assistants so as to pass for my engineers?"

"To persuade you that it will be perfectly safe to put them in the place of Brady and Dunn without fear of the change being discovered."

"But, good heavens, man, Brady and Dunn are engineers!"

"So are Chick and Patsy. Indeed, there is not a more competent engineer alive for his age than Chick."

"And you want me to let you take command of the Merry Mermaid, with your two assistants as engineers?"

"Exactly. You are probably aware that I know every mile of the Atlantic coast line from Florida to Newfoundland, and your yacht and its passengers will be as safe in my charge as in your own. Indeed, I can go further, with all truthfulness, and assure you that your chief passenger will be much safer with me than he would be with you."

"Those are strange words, Mr. Carter."

"I do not use them in connection with the dangers of the sea, Captain Rodman."

"Oh, I see! This voyage is not one of pleasure, then?"

"By no means. My time is too precious to be used for my pleasure."

"The business concerns Judge Gates?"

"It concerns him and several others."

"And he knows?"

"Judge Gates knows nothing, and must know nothing of my plans. He must believe you are really in charge of the yacht."

"What will he say should he discover the deception?"

"When he discovers the deception he will bless you for your part in it with all his soul. I cannot tell you more at present."

"Well, Mr. Carter, knowing you as I do I can only trust you implicitly. I know you have never acted in bad faith, and whatever you undertake is for the best interests of the community. I am going to let you have your way in this matter."

"Thank you, captain."

"When do you want to take possession?"

"When were you to sail?"

"To-morrow at noon."

"Then I'll relieve you about six to-morrow morning. Meanwhile we'll arrange to change engineers to-night."

"How?"

"Wait. How much of a crew have you?"

"Five men and the cook."

"Are the five men old hands on the yacht?"

"No. Four of them were employed last week. The fifth I engaged this afternoon."

"Where?"

"He came on board and asked for employment. I told him to report in the morning."

"Ah!"

Rodman did not fail to notice the peculiar emphasis which the detective put upon the monosyllable.

"I have made many trips with only four men, but as I am to be well paid for this cruise I decided to go full handed, and so employed the extra man."

"What is his name?"

"Darley."

"Very well; I'll have use for Darley."

"I forgot to say that I have no stewardess. I——"

"Never mind; I will procure a stewardess," interrupted Nick.

To himself he added:

"That's where Ida will fit in nicely. If, with the assistance of Chick, Patsy and Ida, I cannot work up Judge Gates' case on the cruise of the Merry Mermaid, I ought to blow up the yacht and all on board, myself included."

As if answering the latter part of the thought, Rodman said, with a smile, as he arose to go:

"Well, Carter, don't blow her up or run her on the rocks before you return."

"I'll try not to, especially so long as I'm aboard, captain."

"To be frank with you," continued Rodman, in a more serious tone of voice, "I'd not be so awfully put out if you did lose the old craft, if nobody got hurt thereby; for you probably know she is an old boat of no great value, in spite of her size, and is badly in need of new engines."

"But she's safe, I presume, or you would not take out a party?"

"Oh, perfectly safe, if well handled. Though slow, she's thoroughly reliable, and just suited to such a cruise as the Judge desires."

"Why don't you get a new yacht, captain?"

Rodman smiled.

"Easier said than done. New yachts cost money, and old yachts are not salable. Why, I couldn't get the insurance for the Merry Mermaid if I was to offer her for sale."

Nick had cause to remember Captain Rodman's words some days later.

CHAPTER II.

DO BIRDS VISIT PAWNSHOPS?

After Captain Rodman left Nick Carter's house, the great detective put his assistants into full knowledge of the case on hand as he had promised Chick.

The reader is entitled to know every particular of the affair, however, and we will take him back briefly to the beginning.

Nick Carter on that day had been surprised by the visit of a young man who came to the house with a letter from Superintendent Byrnes to the detective.

The letter was brief, to the point, and ran thus:

"DEAR NICK:—The bearer of this has just been in consultation with me. After hearing his story, I have concluded to refer him to you without comment, feeling assured in advance that you will be able to do the case justice, reward the innocent, punish the guilty, and bring right to the surface. Yours,
"BYRNES."

Having read this letter, Nick tossed it aside and gave his immediate attention to the young man before him.

"You know who I am?" was the first question.

"Certainly. There are few people in New York who do not know Nick Carter."

"And you want to engage my professional services?"

"I believe Superintendent Byrnes advises it."

"Then the quicker we reach an understanding in your affair the better. What is the nature of your case?"

"To remove from me the suspicion of a crime."

"What kind of a crime?"

"Theft."

"Who makes the charge?"

"My uncle."

"Who is your uncle?"

"Judge Gates."

"Oh! The retired millionaire of Fifth avenue?"

"The same. I am his nephew, George Byron."

"What are you accused of stealing?"

"Very valuable precious stones—rubies."

"How valuable?"

"All together they were worth more than a hundred thousand dollars."

"When were they stolen?"

"At various times during the last three months."

"Then they did not all disappear at any one time?"

"Oh, no! They have been missed right along, one and two lots at a time, for that period?"

"And no one was suspected?"

"That I do not know. My uncle and his wife suppressed a general knowledge of the strange disappearance of the gems until two or three weeks ago. Then I was taken into their confidence."

"That was before you were suspected?"

"Yes."

"To whom did they belong?"

"To my—to Judge Gates' wife?"

"Why do you not say to your aunt?"

"Because I have not got used to giving her the beloved title which I bestowed upon Aunt Lucy before her death"

"You mean Judge Gates' first wife?"

"Yes."

"The present Mrs. Gates, I believe, has not been his wife very long?"

"They were married about six months ago."

"She is young?"

"Not more than twenty-five years old."

"What opportunity had you to take the rubies?"

"I lived in the house. I was my uncle's prospective heir, barring children, the issue of this marriage."

"You say 'was?'"

"Yes. Uncle John has disinherited me."

"How do you know?"

"He burned his will before my eyes, and I have no doubt has carried out his promise to

make a new one to-day, cutting me off from every penny he owns."

"Why does he suspect you of the theft?"

"On account of strong evidence."

"In what form?"

"A pawn ticket for one of the missing jewels was found in one of my pockets."

"Who found it?"

"A young lady who lives in the house."

"What is her name?"

Byron hesitated in his reply just the least, showing a disposition, for the first time, to rebel against Nick's questions.

The detective did not fail to notice this, and to remember it to his advantage.

When Byron did make up his mind to reply, he answered:

"Her name is Mary Good."

"A servant?"

"Hardly that. Her mother occupies the position of housekeeper for Judge Gates. But she is the widow of a respected friend of the judge's who died ten years ago and left Mrs. Good without a dollar. Judge Gates took the widow and the daughter into his house, but Mrs. Good declined to be a pensioner. Therefore, she has ever since acted as his housekeeper."

"This Mrs. Good has seen better days?"

"Decidedly so. Her husband, during his lifetime, kept her in the midst of luxury and society, and when he died, left her deep down in poverty."

"How did Mary Good happen to find the pawn ticket in your pocket?"

"I cannot tell you."

Nick did not fail to notice the wording of Byron's reply:

"I cannot tell you."

The young man did not say, "I don't know."

"How did it get there?"

"Ah! Now you have come to the core of the affair. That is what I want to find out.

It will not only clear me, but must necessarily uncover the thief."

"Do you suspect any one?"

There was another period of hesitation in his reply. Finally he answered, with a slow negative shake of the head:

"This Mary Good?" suggested Nick.

"I am quite positive she is not guilty."

"Why are you so positive?"

Byron moved uneasily in his seat.

"She is not capable of it. If you knew her as I do, you would say so, too."

"Her mother, then?"

"No! no! she would take her own life before she would take a penny which did not belong to her."

"The servants?"

"They have all been in Judge Gates' service for years. There is not a dishonest one among them."

"This new Mrs. Gates herself?"

A scowl flitted over Byron's face for a few moments, and his reply, while positive in its construction, was not so strong in its utterance:

"Mrs. Gates would have no object in stealing her own jewels. Uncle Gates gave them to her absolutely."

"Besides, her character since childhood is against that theory."

"Finally, she has not been out of the house for five months—scarcely at all since her marriage. Indeed she keeps close to her rooms most of the time, spending hours with her birds."

"Her birds, did you say?"

"Yes. Her hobby is birds, and opening off her sitting-room is an apartment which she has fitted up as a sort of aviary. In there she keeps a score of feathered creatures."

"Of what species?"

"I don't know the full list. There are several parrots, a raven, a mocking bird, canaries, pigeons, and——"

"Pigeons! Of what variety?"

"Oh, the ordinary kind, I suppose. They—— Surely you don't think any of those birds stole the jewels."

"Well, some birds, you know, have a weakness for picking up sparkling gems and swallowing them," were Nick's non-committal words.

"But you never heard of a bird visiting a pawnshop," smiled Byron.

"Well, such a thing would not be impossible," replied the detective, stroking his chin complacently.

Byron's smile turned to an expression of growing perplexity.

"Why, what kind of a bird could that be?"

The response brought him to his feet as if sprung from a trap. The response was:

"Carrier pigeons, for instance."

CHAPTER III.

ONLY A LITTLE CLOTH BUTTON.

Byron stood for fully a minute staring at Nick after the latter's startling suggestion recorded in the last paragraph of the preceding chapter.

Then he slowly sank back into his chair, and said, as if not quite certain of his point:

"I am afraid that theory will not hold good."

"Oh, it is not a theory," replied Nick; "simply a possibility."

"It can hardly be a possibility."

"Why not?"

"Because there are only three pigeons."

"Well?"

"There has all the time been three pigeons—no more, no less."

"And what of that?"

"Carrier pigeons would not return of their own accord, and in this instance three pigeons would not have been half enough for the contract."

"Humph!"

With that expression Nick dismissed the pigeons and took up another line of questions.

"Why did not your uncle have you arrested?"

"You'll have to ask him. He merely tore up his will in my presence, ordered me out of his house, and commanded me to never come into his presence again."

"He must have been very certain in his own mind that you were guilty."

"There is no doubt of it. I confess the case must have looked very black to him."

"I am surprised that a man of Judge Gates' good sense should jump to a final conclusion on the mere evidence of that pawn ticket."

"There was more evidence against me—and much more damaging, and he got hold of it before he acted as I have told you."

"What was it?"

"I lost large sums at the race track on the day before yesterday, the day after the pawn ticket was found in my pocket."

"Your own money?"

"Yes. He put a detective on my track, and my losses, which ran up into the thousands, were reported to him."

"Where did you get this money?"

"I had won much of it at the track on previous days."

"Have you been playing the races regularly?"

"Yes, for several months. I began on a very little capital and met with more or less success until that unlucky day. Then everything turned against me just as this detective was at my heels."

"He would not believe that I had met with better success on former days. To his mind it was proved that I had been squandering thousands every day for weeks past among the bookmakers, for the same detective reported that I was a frequenter of the track, and I did not deny it."

"Could you not prove that you had up to that time won more than you lost?"

"No. I was absolutely powerless. You see the signs of guilt which hedge me about, Mr. Carter."

"Yes, I realize the seriousness of your position. You want me to undertake to restore you to the confidence and favor of your uncle?"

"Not only to his confidence, but to that of those whom I hold in still higher esteem."

Nick was looking hard at Byron as the latter uttered these words, and the young man's face slowly flushed under the detective's scrutiny.

"I think I understand you, Mr. Byron," said Nick, slowly. "I will undertake to find out what became of Mrs. Gates' missing jewels."

"You at least believe me innocent, and a much wronged man, Mr. Carter?"

"I never believe anything, Mr. Byron, until it is proven. From the information you have given to me, and what I will gather myself hereafter, I am going to work out this Gates riddle."

"That is all I ask, sir," was the ready response. "The quicker you get to work, the better, too. I fear you may have trouble in pushing your investigation."

"Why?"

"Judge Gates' whole household will sail on a yachting voyage some time to-morrow. I was to have been one of the party, but that has now been changed, of course."

"Does the judge own a yacht?"

"No; he has chartered one for the trip."

"Do you know the name of the yacht?"

"The Merry Mermaid, owned by a man named Rodman. I helped to negotiate with him for the use of his vessel and the services of himself and crew."

Nick received this information with silent self-congratulation, for reasons which we have already discovered.

After some further conversation with Byron, Nick dismissed him, at the same moment ringing for Chick and timing affairs so well that the assistant met the departing caller in the hall.

"I may want to see you again to-night," he said, as Byron went out. "You had better call about half-past nine o'clock."

"I will be on hand."

George Byron kept his promise, and was on hand promptly at the hour named.

He, however, did not conceal the fact that he was in a hurry to get away.

Neither did Nick try to find out why Byron was in such haste, nor did Byron offer an explanation. When he left Nick Carter's house, however, a "shadow" was on his track.

Patsy, under instructions from Nick, was the shadow.

It was nearly midnight when the young Irish lad returned.

Nick was waiting for him.

A sharp glance at Patsy's face was enough to tell the detective that the former had news, and important news at that.

"You followed him?"

"Straight from your door to Carney's saloon on Sixth avenue."

"Whom did he meet there?"

"A man about thirty years of age."

"Ever see him before?"

"Never."

"Find out who he was?"

"I did, by the greatest good luck."

"Byron and the man, as soon as they met, walked back to a table in a far corner and sat down somewhat removed from the other customers in the saloon."

"While I was trying to hit upon a plan to get nearer to them in hope of overhearing something of their whispered conversation, I was attracted by the words of two men sitting at a table near where I stood."

"Do you see those two men over there in the corner?" inquired one of the others, in-

dicating by the direction of his eyes that he was looking toward Byron and his companion.

"Well, the younger is the nephew of Judge Gates, the Fifth avenue millionaire, and heir to all his wealth."

"Who is he with?" was the inquiry.

"That's the significant part of the story. His companion is a bookmaker at the race-track, named Percy—Lloyd Percy. His stand is only two removes from mine."

"It was another bookmaker, then, to whom you were listening?"

"Evidently," replied Patsy.

"Go on," urged Nick.

"Byron and Percy are great friends, which would not be to Byron's advantage, I imagine, if old Gates found it out," declared the bookmaker. "But there is something mysterious about Percy."

"What?" inquired the second man.

"Why, he's a green man at making books, and I know that ever since the spring meeting began he has been losing heavily. Still he keeps right on and pays out regularly."

"Has a large roll, I suppose," suggested the other.

"Must have, but it is not a real gambler's roll, you can bet on that, or he'd take better care of it and draw out when bad luck becomes too persistent."

"Why does he keep at a losing venture, then?"

"That is it. The man is infatuated with the horses about which he knows so little. Byron's judgment is much better, but lately the younger man has let himself be influenced by Percy, and he, too, has lost heavily."

"Who is this Percy?"

"Nobody knows much about him. He has never been in the betting ring till this year."

"Just then Byron and Percy arose and started for the street. I didn't dare risk losing Byron, and leaving the two gossipers, I followed my men."

"They went out on the avenue, where, after a brief consultation, they parted."

"I, of course, followed Byron, and a merry little chase he led me."

"Think he suspected he was followed?"

"I hardly think so—not by me, at least. He went to Broadway, and down Broadway to Twenty-third street."

"Then he crossed over to Sixth avenue again and took a surface car."

"At Thirty-third street he left the surface car and took the elevated road to Forty-second street. There he once more 'left the track,' descended to the street, and took a horse car west to Eighth avenue."

"Just off Eighth avenue, on Forty-fourth street, he finally brought up at the entrance of a large apartment house."

"He rang the bell above the name 'Driscoll.'"

"While I was bothering my wits what to do next, he went up stairs, came down again, and went away in a hurry."

"He was apparently laboring under great fright of some kind."

"His changed appearance as he came out led me to alter my plans."

"I let him go and turned my attention to the Driscoll flat. By ringing an upper bell, I got inside and went to the third floor right."

"The door of the flat stood ajar, and pushing it open, I entered. The front of the flat was deserted, and I walked to the rear."

"It seemed deserted, too."

"But in the kitchen, stretched on the floor, I found the form of a young woman."

"The gas was burning brightly, and it took but one glance to tell me that the girl was dead."

"Dead? Murder?"

"Without a doubt. She had been stabbed—and very recently. Though the pulse was entirely gone, the body was still warm."

"This is getting interesting," exclaimed Nick.

"It will interest you still more to learn that I found this on the floor, under the sofa, near where the body lay," said Patsy, holding up a large pocket-knife, whose largest blade was two and a half inches long.

Patsy opened this blade very gingerly and held the weapon up before Nick.

"The blade is bloody, and on the handle are the initials, 'G. B.'"

"That looks bad for Byron."

"And these make it still worse for him. In a hasty search around the room, I found several other articles."

Thereupon Patsy laid two envelopes and a cloth button upon the table before Nick.

The detective carefully examined each one in turn. On the envelopes was the name of George Byron. A frown covered Nick's face as he examined them.

Then he picked up the cloth button and scrutinized it with more care than he had given any of the other articles.

"You did not disturb the body or anything else in the room?" he finally asked.

"I did not. I left everything in exactly the state I found it except that I brought those four articles away."

"Sure you left no tangible evidence of the crime behind?"

"I am positive I did not."

"You have done well, my boy."

"What will you do with Byron now?" asked Patsy, unable to suppress his anxiety and curiosity.

"What," was the calm reply, "I am more determined than ever to rescue him from the enemies who are seeking his reputation and his life."

"What? You think he did not kill that girl?" exclaimed Patsy.

"I know he didn't, my boy. The knife and envelopes were 'planted.' But this little button is a whole regiment of witnesses in itself."

"It is not Byron's?" finally gasped Patsy, as the truth dawned on him.

"It is not. Byron went right from this house to that flat without having time to change his clothes. The suit he wore hadn't a cloth button on it."

"This button belongs to some one besides Byron; probably to the murderer of that poor girl."

"But what is she to Byron?"

"We must find that out as we go along," was Nick's quiet reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRUISE OF THE MERRY MERMAID.

Before the middle of the following afternoon the Merry Mermaid was under a full head of steam sailing eastward beyond Sandy Hook.

Neither Judge Gates nor any member of the crew held the least suspicion that the captain and his two engineers were not exactly what they pretended to be—Rodman, Brady and Dunn—but were the celebrated Nick Carter and his two assistants.

Nor did Mrs. Gates suspect that the mature, elderly looking stewardess was another of Nick Carter's aids, Ida, who was constantly watching her every movement.

Nick had managed the exchange of officers very easily. According to his instructions, Rodman sent Brady and Dunn ashore the night before, after he had seen Nick.

They had permission to remain indefinitely, provided they said nothing to any member of the crew.

Both eagerly accepted the opportunity.

At daylight Chick and Patsy, as the

doubles of Brady and Dunn, went aboard, and the deception was not noticed by any of the five men nor the cook.

Soon afterward Rodman went ashore, and an hour later Nick came back in his place, having received from Rodman meanwhile full information concerning the latter's previous negotiations with Gates.

The detective's attention was particularly attracted to Judge Gates' young wife.

When she first came aboard, she was closely veiled, and walked with the assistance of a servant. Before they reached the Narrows, however, the young woman was propped up in an easy chair on deck, and seemed to be enjoying the situation with the delight which would naturally come under such circumstances to one who had been jammed up in close rooms for weeks.

Nick was not slow to observe that Mrs. Gates was a young woman of remarkably fine figure, graceful carriage, and beautiful features.

He also soon assured himself that the elderly millionaire seemed very fond of his young wife.

As soon as they were well out at sea Nick set about as he only knew how, gaining the friendship and confidence of Judge Gates.

This was all the more easily accomplished when Mrs. Gates was forced to retire to her state-room on account of sea-sickness.

Gates was, therefore, thrown a great deal into the company of the pseudo-captain of the vessel.

It was not many days until Nick had the millionaire's confidence to such an extent that he went in search of certain information which he greatly desired to obtain.

"How is Mrs. Gates this morning?" he asked, cheerily, of the judge, as the latter came on deck early on the third day out.

"Much improved in health, thank you," was the response. "She will be able to come

on deck this evening, I think. What is better still, her weak ankle is much better since her enforced quiet in her state-room."

"Has she suffered with that ankle long?"

"Almost since she arrived in America. It has kept her nearly constantly confined to her rooms, or at least to the house. She has been more or less afflicted with it since she was a child."

"You have known her since she was so young then?" inquired Nick.

"Not personally. I never saw her till last fall, though her father and I were the most intimate of friends."

"Excuse me, judge, but your marriage to Mrs. Gates seems to be somewhat romantic."

"It is. Would you like to hear about it?"

"I should be delighted."

"It is not much of a story," said the judge. "As I have told you, her father, Colonel Frederic, and I were schoolmates.

"The friendship we formed in college followed us through life, though for years we were separated.

"He went to Europe. I was engaged in America.

"But though we did not see each other for twenty years before his death, we corresponded regularly.

"He married in Calcutta, and my wife was the only issue of the marriage.

"Her mother died young, and she was educated in a private school near Florence, where they afterward resided.

"Frederic's letters to me were full of the worshipful feeling he held for his only child.

"Less than a year ago he sent me his will, in which he had left his child and his few possessions to my guardianship.

"A few weeks later he wrote that a premonition of the end had come upon him, and before he died, he wanted me to promise to take care of his daughter when he was gone.

"I was the only one on earth to whom he

was willing to trust her. In this letter he wrote near the end:

"If I could only see her your wife, much as may be the difference in your ages, I would die happy, for I know and trust you as I can or will trust no other man. Herein please find her portrait inclosed. If you can learn to love her by looking at it, do so, and be ready to take her to your heart when she comes to you."

"I need scarcely tell you that I found it not hard to obey the injunction. The photograph made me familiar with the face of his child before I saw her."

"Almost on the heels of the letter came a cablegram announcing his sudden death. The message was signed by his daughter, and also stated that she would sail for New York by the next steamer."

"I had, therefore, no chance to go after her."

"She came, I saw, she conquered."

Several other opportunities were offered to Nick during the day, whereby he fell into conversation with Judge Gates, and without the latter's knowledge, he succeeded in getting a great deal of information of use to him in the case in hand.

Chick was wide awake. Whenever he could leave the engine in Patsy's care, he gave his attention to other things and various people on the yacht without appearing to be particularly interested in anything but the machinery.

Late that evening, while Gates and his wife were enjoying the moonlight on deck in each other's company, Chick found an opportunity to join Nick at the wheel.

Once assured that they were alone and safe from being overheard, they lost no time in comparing notes.

"Are you making progress, Nick?" was Chick's first inquiry.

"Slowly."

"What have you found out?"

"A good many things. First, it is now clear to me that Mrs. Gates is deceiving the judge."

"In what?"

"Several things. For instance, the lame ankle was only pretended—not real."

"She had some object in that?"

"Undoubtedly; and it served some purpose while she was in New York which is not bothering her on board this yacht, so her lame ankle has suddenly grown better, and she gets around deck with considerable ease."

"What was her game with the lame ankle, Nick?"

"It could be only one thing—an excuse to keep shut up in Judge Gates' house."

"Why should she do that?"

"She may have a good reason for keeping hid from the world."

"A fear of being recognized by some one or more persons if they met her on the street?"

"That's right, Chick. Some such fear kept her a voluntary prisoner in her husband's Fifth avenue mansion for five months. Why, she even got excused from going riding by pretending a mortal fear of horses, alleging that she had been greatly frightened by a runaway team when she was a girl of twelve."

"Might not this close confinement to the house in New York have had some other object as well, Nick?"

"What other object?"

"Well, you believe she knows what became of her rubies?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"By staying indoors all the time no suspicion could fall upon her of having disposed of them herself."

"While that theory is true, Chick, it is not enough to account for her strange act of deception. No, she had a stronger motive for keeping away from the eyes of the world. She was in hiding. The strain was too heavy."

however, and this yachting trip was resorted to for the purpose of letting her out and to break the self-imposed imprisonment."

"Did she propose the voyage on the yacht?"

"Yes. And in doing so she betrayed herself to us, but not to her husband. No woman who is such a poor sailor as she would seek pleasure in a trip to sea on a yacht."

"She had a confederate or confederates in her disposal of those rubies, Nick."

"There can be no doubt of it."

"Not in the least, hold?"

"No, that is certain—at least, not in the shape of human beings."

"You still believe her pigeons are of the carrier species?"

"Yes, in spite of Byron's assurance that there are only three and always were three of them."

"Well, Byron may be mistaken."

"No. I had a chance to talk to Ida a few minutes this afternoon. Those pigeons were one of her points of investigation, and she has learned from the colored woman who was Mrs. Gates' attendant that there were three pigeons brought into the house, and that three have been there ever since."

"That's a puzzle, for a carrier pigeon would not return."

"Not under ordinary circumstances."

"What do you mean by that, Nick?"

"Well, Ida also found out that Mrs. Gates fed her birds herself and this colored woman is certain that she didn't give the same attention to the pigeons she gave to some of her other pets."

"Oh, ho!"

"The pigeons seemed to be all but half starved half the time."

"Ah, ha!"

"Once, out of sympathy for the birds, the colored woman fed them herself and found them ravenously hungry."

"Did Mrs. Gates find it out?"

"Yes, and became so angry that the offender says she thought at first the enraged lady would assault her."

"Gave herself away, eh?"

"Temporarily. And she mixed things up more yet when she cooled off so quick and pretended it didn't make any difference, but cautioned the servant not to meddle with the food of the birds again."

"Well?"

"I am thoroughly convinced that those pigeons have been carrying Mrs. Gates' rubies away to a confederate."

"But how did she get them back?"

"By starving them at each end of the line before the feathered carriers were dispatched, and by feeding them as soon as they arrived."

"At each end of the line?"

"That's what I said. Can't you see through the scheme?"

"Don't know that I can."

"There are two sets of birds. There are two places where they are fed. When starved and set free at one place, they fly to the other, where food awaits them."

"Now, whenever Mrs. Gates sent a bird away freighted with its precious load, another would be sent back to her from the other end of the exchange."

"This was probably done at night."

"In that way three pigeons were constantly in Mrs. Gates' collection of birds, except perhaps, during a few hours of the night when the exchange was made."

"It looks reasonable," said Chick.

"It is reasonable."

"If we could find the man who conducted the other end of the pigeon line," mused Chick, "we'd be closer to the end of our work."

"Well, I think I have found him," was Nick's quiet response.

"Eh? Found him? Who? Where?"

"I told you to keep your eyes on the fifth

man of the crew engaged by Rodman—that fellow Darley.”

“I have been watching him, and have discovered nothing.”

“But I have. Darley is no common laborer. On the contrary, he is Mrs. Gates’ accomplice.”

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN AT THE LOOKOUT.

“Well, by Jove!” exclaimed Chick. “It never occurred to me that Darley was more than a spy for Mrs. Gates.”

“He is more than a spy, and is on board for an important purpose. I am going to find out what that purpose is, Chick.”

“How?”

“I’ll tell you; last night, between twelve and four o’clock, I was at the wheel and Boardman was on the lookout.”

“Well?”

“About one o’clock Mrs. Gates came on deck. While passing me, she declared she was not able to sleep and had come on deck to get rid of her nervousness.

“Presently she walked forward and stood talking quite a while with Boardman.”

“What did she say to him?”

“I questioned Boardman about it, and he said she asked him all sorts of questions about yachting.”

“Did he tell you the truth, Nick?”

“I have no doubt about it.”

“Then what had that incident to do with the case in hand?”

“Tonight Darley has that same watch? It is his regular turn on which she has been looking out.”

“Oh I see! She was fixing a precedent which would avert suspicion from a proposed similar meeting with Darley to-night.”

“Exactly.”

“And she will be telling this to her confidante to-night?”

“Precisely.”

“But she will be talking to Nick Carter instead?”

“Correct.”

“Disguised as Darley?”

“That’s the programme, Chick.”

“Where will Darley be?”

“Sleeping soundly below. Ida will attend to his slumbers. I will afterward tell him the watch was shifted for some reason.”

“And as I have the wheel in that watch I’ll be a witness to your masquerade?”

“You will have the pleasure.”

“Nick, I envy you your job.”

“Well, if it was not your turn at the wheel you might have it.”

Nick’s programme was carried out that night as he had detailed it to Chick.

There was a chance of its miscarrying only by reason of a possibility that Nick’s theory covering Mrs. Gates’ object in coming on deck so late the night before and of her sought interview with the man on the lookout was wrong.

The theory, however, proved correct.

“Almost at the same hour she had appeared on deck the night previous Mrs. Gates came up from below and stopped a moment to speak to Chick at the wheel.

“It is such a lovely night,” she said, “and I have not been able to get to sleep. A little visit to the deck last night helped me to sleep materially, so I concluded to try it again.”

After a few words, Mrs. Gates passed forward and strolled up to the supposed Darley who was leaning over the rail at the prow.

Having satisfied herself that she was safe from being overheard except by the man by her side, she plunged into her subject.

“Is everything ready?”

“Yes, so far as my part goes,” replied Nick at random.

He had noted Darley’s usual habit of fear detection on that same last night.

that his answers might betray the deception that any minute.

It was a desperate game he was playing, and he was taking desperate chances.

"You're sure there's no danger of failure?"

"Not so far as my part goes."

"Well, be ready for Friday night. This is Tuesday night. We touch at Portland tomorrow because Captain Rodman wants to lay in a few more supplies. We'll anchor off the island some time Friday evening.

"I'll see to it that nobody goes ashore before morning.

"That will be our opportunity.

"Once anchored, everybody will sleep soundly but the man on watch.

"You must arrange it to have the after midnight watch.

"That will let us blow up the yacht and get away safely ourselves."

"All right. I'll be ready."

"Are you sure you'll have no trouble in getting the machine to work?"

"There can be no mistake. I'll see to that."

"For Heaven's sake, don't make a mistake! Set it so as to give us plenty of time to get out of harm's way before the explosion comes. Don't drink any coffee or tea that night—iced or hot—for I intend to put just enough 'drugs' in both to insure every one a sound sleep without knocking them completely out before they retire."

"Forewarned is forearmed."

"You are sure it is enough to make an end of every soul on the yacht?"

"Quite sure."

"Mind, there must be no chance of any one being left to tell the real story of the fate of the Merry Mermaid."

"No danger of that."

"Well, give us plenty of time to get to the island before the explosion comes."

"Trust me for that."

"Seems to me you are very chary of your speech to-night, Bert."

"Well, it won't do to talk too much. I don't like that fellow at the wheel. He seems to be watching us."

"Maybe we'd better cut it short and I'll go below. I think we understand each other pretty well."

"We surely do."

"Set your machine for three o'clock in the morning. We can leave the yacht about two and be safe on the island when the destruction comes."

"All right; just as you say. Now go below."

She obeyed without another word, stopping long enough on her way back to say to Chick:

"That is rather a gruff sort of a sailor you have forward. I've been doing my best to engage him in conversation, but only got short answers from him."

As she went down the companion-way, Nick watched her till she disappeared.

Then he muttered:

"It is worse than I dreamed. The two children of Satan have plotted to blow up the yacht with every soul on board save their two precious selves.

"It will not do to disappoint such painstaking conspirators.

"The Merry Mermaid is doomed.

"Darley's infernal machine must be allowed to do its work.

"But when the yacht is blown into a million splinters, where do you suppose Nick Carter will be, Mrs. Gates?"

"I'll just give you rope and see how long it will be till you hang yourself."

CHAPTER VI.

A POINT WHICH PUZZLED NICK.

It required a good deal of desperate counterplotting to carry out Nick Carter's plan to a successful ending. Though it had been Darley's watch on the lookout, when Mrs.

Gates came up to speak to him, that worthy was sleeping undisturbedly during those hours, the victim of a mild narcotic.

As soon as the opportunity offered, Nick resumed his original disguise as Captain Rodman, and remained at the lookout for the rest of the watch.

Darley's suspicions were not aroused, for an excuse had been prearranged whereby he was relieved from duty in his regular turn that night.

Being unused to such servitude, and, as Nick shrewdly guessed, having no prearranged engagement or understanding with Mrs. Gates, he was wholly unaware that another man, by masquerading as his double, had secured his secret.

But now Nick must have Darley instructed with Mrs. Gates' plans, so they could be carried out—so far as policy required.

To do this Ida was called into service.

The shrewd young lady assistant secured some of Mrs. Gates' note-paper, and a specimen of her penmanship.

The rest was easy.

When Darley found a note in his hammock written in Mrs. Gates' well-known hand, containing an abstract of her plans and instructions, as she had recited them to Nick, he did not suspect treachery or a trap.

"How the devil did she manage to get this note here without discovery?" he muttered.

"I suppose she found it impossible to get a word with me in person. Well, she must have been almost at her wit's end to reach me in this manner, but she did it.

"There are few women, or men either, who can outwit her or foil her in a purpose once she sets out to accomplish it.

"I'm proud of her, and when the old man is blown to kingdom come and she has his money in her possession, I'll not remain long on this side of the Atlantic.

"Things seem to be working out our way. She is safely disposed of, and thanks to my precaution and luck, young Byron will find it hard to escape with his life when the law takes hold of the girl's death.

"Lloyd is the only obstacle in our path or will be after Friday night. Still I think I can handle him satisfactorily.

"It is a desperate game; but the stake is worth the risk.

"A man might as well be hanged as to live a life of eternal struggle against odds, and without the means to reach the enjoyment of life."

These thoughts followed each other through Darley's mind, and at the end he concluded he had reason to congratulate himself with the prospects which confronted him and his female ally.

Had he been aware that Nick Carter, and Nick's three faithful aids scarcely allowed him to remain out of sight of one or the other long enough to take three consecutive breaths, Mr. Darley would not have felt so well satisfied with his prospects.

But such was the case. It was necessary now to take every precaution to prevent the two conspirators from holding any communication with each other for fear the deception which had been practiced upon them would be discovered.

Before setting off on their journey, Nick knew that after sailing eastward a few hundred miles, the yacht would head for an uninhabited island off the eastern coast of Maine, on which Judge Gates, some years before, had spent a few weeks with a party of friends.

The programme was to land there and remain ashore in the day-time so long as was agreeable, everybody sleeping on the yacht, for the sake of comfort and convenience.

It was Nick's own plan to remain

made it necessary for the yacht to touch at Portland for some forgotten supplies.

His real object was to secure copies of New York papers of the day following that upon which the Merry Mermaid started on the cruise.

He knew the newspapers of that date would have full accounts of the tragedy on Forty-fourth street, and he wanted to be satisfied that public impression would be as he hoped it would be.

His wife was instructed to mail the newspapers to Portland, and in order to avoid suspicion, to also mail some of another date.

When they landed at Portland, Chick went ashore and got the papers, together with the supplies which had furnished an excuse for the "put in."

The mail wrappers were left behind, and no one but Nick and his assistants knew that Chick had not purchased them at a news-stand hap-hazard.

Nick found what he wanted, an account of the Forty-fourth street tragedy.

As the detective supposed would be the case, it was set down as an undoubted murder.

Little or nothing was known of the victim.

She had been brought to the flat two months before by a man who shortly left her, and had been seen to go into her apartments only two or three times afterward.

She had told the janitor that he was her brother, but that he had to be absent from the city on business most of the time.

Another young man had been known to visit her on a number of occasions—more frequently than her supposed husband.

When questioned by the janitor, she had replied that this person was her husband's cousin, and came to her on business, which attracted attention during her husband's absence.

Her name was Driscoll.

That was the extent of the coroner's investigation, and the verdict was suicide.

The police were looking for the husband and the agent, but had failed to find either.

In the course of the day Nick managed to have the papers fall into the hands of Mrs. Gates.

He was not long in making up his mind through Ida's report that Mrs. Gates had no knowledge of the dead woman of Forty-fourth street.

Then the papers were turned over to the deck-hands.

Darley showed an entirely different interest in the Forty-fourth street affair from that exhibited by his confederate.

He did not hesitate to turn at once to the account of the crime, and read it eagerly when no one, as he supposed, was watching him.

When Chick told Nick how Darley had acted, and Nick placed Chick's report alongside that which Ida had previously made, he said:

"That is a strange phase of this case. It is evident that Mrs. Gates does not know anything of the Forty-fourth street woman, but that Darley was desperately interested in her."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MERRY MERMAID.

Nick Carter's experience as a thorough yachtsman stood him well in hand during this cruise. He so timed himself that the Merry Mermaid came in sight of the island about sunset.

Mrs. Gates, previous to that time, had expressed a desire not to land until morning, even if they should come to anchor early in the evening.

It did not surprise Nick to discover that she had made such a request of her husband.

Much to his satisfaction, the evening set in cloudy, and a dark night was assured before daylight faded away.

A fog began to creep out over the waves also, and the island disappeared from view before the twilight could shut it out.

Thereby Nick seized upon the opportunity to change his course somewhat, and when he came to anchor it was off the northern shores of the island, instead of to the westward, as was indicated by the yacht's course before the fog began to obscure the vision.

When the anchor was finally dropped, and the Merry Mermaid swung around, with her engines at a standstill, only two of all who were aboard knew the exact direction of the island. The two were Nick Carter and Chick.

Nick was not surprised when Mrs. Gates came to him shortly after the anchor was dropped, and said:

"In which direction is the island, captain?"

Nick indicated a few points off the starboard bows, and replied:

"Right out there."

"How far?"

"Fully half a mile. The water is shallow, and I concluded it would not be safe to go closer to shore in this fog."

"So the island will be off our starboard bows all night?"

"Oh, no. The tide will turn before midnight, and from that time till daylight the yacht's bows will be in exactly the opposite direction."

She thanked him, and walked away as if she had been merely gratifying a woman's curiosity.

But Nick muttered under his breath:

"She has taken her bearings for Darley. There is no sailor. I have given them to her in such a way that they must surely lose the island should the fog continue and it undoubtedly will."

The stewardess happened to be in the cook's galley that evening while supper was being prepared, and through her awkwardness the coffee was spoiled, and a second quantity had to be prepared.

No one except her, the cook and the man from whom she had received her instructions, knew that coffee had been prepared twice, and consequently Mrs. Gates had no means of knowing that her sedative went into the ocean with the first quantity of the beverage.

The tea, however, went upon the table with the drops in it, and was partaken of by Judge Gates and Mrs. Good.

Mrs. Gates, for the first time during the cruise, refused her cup of tea, on the plea that she believed it had been the cause of her sleeplessness.

Among the crew, it was noticed that Darley drank no coffee, but he plead as an excuse a slight attack of indigestion.

Everybody except two of the crew was given permission to turn in as early as he wished, and get an undisturbed night's rest.

The two exceptions were detailed to divide the watch between them.

One of the two was Darley.

To make the latter's task easy Nick had arranged that he should have the second watch, from one o'clock till daylight.

Both men were instructed to call Nick in the event of anything out of the usual course happening.

By ten o'clock the yacht was wrapped in silence.

Every soul aboard seemed to be asleep except the man on the watch, and he began to nod in spite of all that he could do to shake off his drowsiness.

Before midnight he had succumbed to the influence of a drug which Nick had managed to give him, so that when Darley found the man asleep, he would have no reason to

doubt that all on board were similarly affected.

Promptly at one o'clock, Darley came on deck without waiting to be called by the man he was to relieve.

As he expected he found the sailor propped up against the capstan sound asleep.

Darley shook the fellow vigorously. The only response was a grunt, and a continuation of the man's helpless condition.

"Well, Nette has done the work pretty effectually. Her plan was splendidly carried out. All I've got to do now is to wait for her."

"Then the machine and the boat. After that, clear sailing for wealth and an easy, luxurious time for the rest of our lives."

He had not long to wait. Almost without warning, except by a faint rustle, Mrs. Gates appeared at his side.

"Is it all right?" she asked anxiously, in a whisper, pointing to the sleeping sailor.

"Have no fears for him. He's dead to the world."

"Then it is the same with everybody in the cabin, for not one at the tables except myself refused coffee or tea at supper. They'll awake in eternity, if your infernal machine is effective."

"Trust me for that. If the yacht were a battleship it would not leave a stick of timber of the entire ship unsplintered."

"Well, the sooner everything is accomplished, the better," she coolly replied, as if planning a pleasure party instead of conspiring for the death of a human being—her husband among the number.

"Stay here, then, till I go down and set the clock-work of the machine."

She detained him by placing her hand on his arm long enough to say:

"Be very careful and not too much in a hurry. There is no danger of any one

awakening, and we must have plenty of time to reach the island and get well in from the shore before the explosion occurs."

"Well, I'll set it for an hour. That will give us all the time we want."

Darley was below decks about ten minutes. When he came back there was a nervous haste to his actions.

Without a word, he proceeded to lower the yawl, and then helped Mrs. Gates into it.

Not a word passed between the two conspirators till Darley himself dropped into the boat and picked up the oars.

"Are you sure of your bearings?" he asked, in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"I looked out for that," she said, calmly. "Row away as I guide, and we'll come to the island in good time."

"Well, I hope you've made no mistake, for this confounded fog makes it extremely awkward, and we want to get on land before the explosion comes."

"If we should miss the island, it would not do to change our course and look for it so long as the yacht lies somewhere near with its deadly destroyer. So here goes!"

Silently his oars went into the water, and the boat glided away into the fog with not enough noise to be distinguished from the lapping waves against the sides of the doomed yacht.

As the boat disappeared, the form of a man crawled from beneath a pile of tarpaulins, which lay not five feet from the spot where Mrs. Gates and Darley had held their hasty conference.

It was Brady, the engineer, otherwise our friend Chick.

He listened with all the powers of his acute sense of hearing, till the gentle dip of Darley's oars could be heard no more.

Then he went hastily below.

Patsy and Nick had already ascended the three remaining men of the crew, as well as

the cook, and by giving them an inkling of the situation, without disclosing anything of the real truth, got them quietly on deck, where they lost no time in lowering the large life-boat.

Meanwhile, Ida had taken Mary Good into her confidence enough to make that young lady realize that her mother and Judge Gates were under the influence of an opiate, and that such grave danger menaced the yacht that all hands were forced to leave it in haste.

Silence was impressed upon all as a necessity of vital importance.

To the good sense of everybody left on board, Nick found his task of deserting the yacht comparatively easy.

In fifteen minutes the entire crew and passengers, including Judge Gates' servants, were in the large life-boat.

A supply of food and water was also lowered and stowed away in the bows.

When Judge Gates, Mrs. Good and the fourth sailor were helped into the boat in a half-dazed condition, there were signs of confusion among the crew and the servants.

Especially did Mary Good give indications of letting her uneasy curiosity carry her away.

But Ida was at her side, and whispered into her ear words which kept her silent, and partly calmed her fears.

With the sailors, nothing remained but to obey the captain, who gave the orders in a low tone, as he took his seat at the tiller.

"Not a word from any one, but row hard, as if your life depended upon each stroke."

A moment later, the boat with its precious freight was shooting through the fog at a right-angle to the course taken by the yawl.

This was kept for half an hour.

Then Nick gave the order to "rest oars," and the boat came to a stop, rocking on the waves as if at anchor.

The fog was still dense, and the night being dark, it was impossible to see more than a few feet in any direction.

Nick sat calmly with his hand on the tiller, but it was plain to all who watched him in the uncertain light that he was listening.

The boat had been rocking in its place of rest for ten minutes, when the sound of a terrific explosion followed a mighty flash of light, a mile or more in their wake.

As the rumbling sound of the explosion died away in the stillness of this night at sea, Nick said, in a voice which was no longer modulated:

"That is the last of the Merry Mermaid. Not a square foot of her timber remains to tell her fate, and all who are in this boat are supposed to have shared the fate of the yacht."

"Captain Rodman, where is Mrs. Gates?"

It was Mary Good who made the inquiry.

"Mrs. Gates left the yacht in the yawl before we did."

"Who went with her?"

"The man known as Darley."

"Where did they go?"

"They supposed they were going to the island, but I think they missed their course."

"And where are we going?"

"To the main-land, about twenty miles away."

"What does it mean, Captain Rodman?"

"I'll tell you when we reach land, Miss Good. Then in return I'll want you to tell me a few things."

"Why, what about?"

"Well, about George Byron and that paw ticket, for instance."

Nick leaned forward and whispered the latter words in her ear.

The girl gave a half-gasp, half-sob, and hid her face in her hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE COAST OF MAINE.

The sun was several hours high when the boat of the unfortunate Merry Mermaid landed its passengers on the main-land.

It was a wild and almost uninhabited section of the Maine coast.

The three drugged people did not awake to consciousness of their surroundings until they had landed.

An improvised camp was pitched several hundred feet from the shore, in a grove of trees, and the cook of the crew was put to work preparing breakfast for the party.

Meanwhile, Judge Gates had emerged from a state of stupor enough to realize that something extraordinary had occurred and his wife was missing.

At the same time the fact forced itself on his mind that it was not the small island in the ocean on which they had disembarked, but a very much longer tract of land.

Therefore, he began to beset the supposed captain of the Merry Mermaid with anxious questions.

Nick took the millionaire by the arm and led him gently to a place where their voices would be beyond the reach of the ears of the other people in the camp.

Then the detective said:

Judge Gates, do you know where we are?

"I do not, Captain Restman, but I am positive it is not the island near which we anchored last evening."

"It is not. We are twenty miles away from that island."

"Then we are on the main-land of Maine?"

"Yes."

"How did we get here?"

"We came in the life-boat."

"The life-boat. Merciful Heaven! what happened? Where is my wife? Tell me! I beg; do not keep me in suspense."

"Calm yourself, judge. No harm has come to your wife yet."

"But she is not here."

"No."

"Then, in mercy's name, where is she?"

"Mrs. Gates left the yacht before we did, bound for the island."

"Who went with her? Surely, she didn't go alone."

"No! One of the crew—Darley—rowed her over."

"Why was she left there? What does it mean? How is it that I have slept all through the journey in an open boat to this place?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I must have been drugged."

"You were."

"By whom?"

"By the deadliest enemy you have in the world."

"Deadly enemy! I have no enemy."

"None of whom you were aware. Secret enemies are the worst to be feared."

"Who is this enemy?"

"The woman to whom you gave your name."

"My wife? You are crazy. I'll not believe any such accusation."

"I knew you would not believe her guilty unless the most absolute proofs were produced. I have spared no pains to get such evidence."

"Evidence of my wife's treachery? To prove she is not all she seems? Why, man alive! What evidence can you produce to prove that?"

"The best proof probably is that not a whole stick of timber of the yacht, the Merry Mermaid remains to tell the world that such a vessel once existed."

"Destroyed? The yacht wrecked?"

"Most completely."

"How?"

"Blown to atoms with an infernal machine."

"My God! Who did it?"

"Your wife, assisted by the man known as Darley, who took her away in the yawl before the explosion, and while she supposed everybody else on board was asleep under the influence of the drug, of which you were a victim."

Gates sat stupefied for fully a minute. Then he whispered, hoarsely:

"I cannot comprehend what you say."

"I know it is hard to believe, judge, but there is no doubt in this case, whatever. The proofs are not to be even questioned. You don't know who I am."

"Who are you? Why, you are Captain Rodman."

"I am not Captain Rodman. That gentleman has not been on board the yacht since you set sail in her from New York."

"What are you trying to make me believe?" was the impatient reply.

"Nothing but the truth, judge. In proof of what I say, notice this:"

With a few dexterous movements Nick removed his wig and false beard.

Gates almost recoiled in his astonishment. At last he gasped:

"Then who are you?"

"Nick Carter."

"What! the great detective?"

"I am sometimes honored by being called a great detective."

"And you have been masquerading as——"

"As Captain Rodman, who willingly agreed to the substitution, and went off with his wife on a visit to Lake George."

"But his yacht is destroyed!"

"Yes. He will, however, be doubly paid for it."

"By whom?"

"By you."

"By me?"

"That's what I said. Surely, your life is worth more than the price of two such yachts."

"There you go again. My life——"

"Has been saved at the expense of Captain Rodman's yacht."

"Ah! You said you had the proof of wife's guilt."

"I have. The best in the world."

"What is it?"

"Her confession."

"She confessed—to you?"

"Yes, but she thought she was talking her confederate, whereas it was I, disguised to look like him."

"What confederate?"

"The man Darley."

"Who is he?"

"That we must find out later. I know. He is more than a common laborer, however."

"What did she confess?"

"That she and Darley had conspired to blow up the yacht after drugging all other people on board, and destroy them in the mince-meat wreck. I let her carry out the scheme in part."

"How so?"

"She blew up the yacht."

"And thinks we all perished in the explosion?"

"Exactly."

"What is your object in letting the plot you allege it was, go even that far?"

"So that she may believe that you and the rest of us are dead, and beyond the possibility of ever appearing to thwart her plans; hopes."

"What plans? What hopes?"

"To possess your wealth as your widow."

"Why, she would have done that in a year at the latest. I am an old man, and she knows my will leaves everything to her."

"True, but she would have stood in constant danger of being found out while waiting for your natural death."

"I understand. In what?"

"In the fact that she is an impostor."

"An impostor?"

"You believe she is the daughter of your friend, Colonel Frederic?"

"I know she is."

"How do you know it? Did you ever see her before she came to you after the colonel's death?"

"Why, no; not in person. But I had her photograph, and the resemblance was positively striking."

"Oh, the photograph was of her, no doubt. Did you send it to you?"

"Colonel Frederic, not two months before his death."

"Accompanied by a letter?"

"Yes."

"In his handwriting?"

"Why, no. The letter was type-written. It bore his signature. Nobody could imitate that."

"Oh, I've no doubt Colonel Frederic dictated the letter and signed it. He kept a secret, no doubt."

"I know he did. In one of his letters he referred to his secretary."

"Was the secretary a man?"

"I don't really know."

"Well, I do. It was a woman."

"You know her?"

"I have seen her. So have you."

"You are mistaken."

"No. I am not. You have not only seen her, but you have made her your wife, and she has murdered you."

"Judge Gates, you have been deceived."

"Frederic's secretary substituted her photograph for that of his daughter, and his death came to you as Miss Frederic."

"Good God! Can it be! Then where is the real daughter?"

"Hidden, only known. Dead, I fear, and the hands of that woman's confederates."

CHAPTER IX.

MARY GOOD'S SECRET.

Nick Carter and Judge Gates remained in conversation long after they had been called to a late breakfast.

The detective explained fully to the millionaire every circumstance which led his suspicions up to the destruction of the yacht.

"My original intention in getting possession of the yacht as its supposed owner and captain was to watch your wife and her confederate, whom from the first I believed was the man Darley."

"When I gave her the opportunity, as she believed, to talk to Darley, she talked to me instead, and laid bare such a devilish plan as even I, an experienced detective, didn't believe her capable of."

"Then the temptation was too great to resist, and I decided to act on a bold and hazardous counter-plot whereby she might be allowed to go to the end of her rope. I think it will succeed."

"Are you not afraid she has by this time discovered the fact that it was not Darley she talked to that night at the lookout?"

"Oh, she has no doubt made that discovery, but she will be certain of the death of every one on board the Merry Mermaid, that she will hardly be restrained from returning to New York as your widow and one of the two survivors of the wrecked yacht, to claim your fortune under the will."

"But I'll be there to confront her."

"I beg your pardon," smiled Nick. "But you'll not confront her right away. I'll arrange all that. There are several other birds to snare."

"But good Lord, Carter! See how I have wronged my nephew! We must make speedy reparation to him!"

"It was to repair the wrong done to him that I entered into this case which has turned out so strangely. Yes, we must make reparation and also rescue him from his enemies."

"What danger?"

"Of being accused of murder."

"Why, who accuses him?"

"No one, yet. Ask me no questions on that score just now. You shall know all in good time. You do not now believe him guilty of the theft of the rubies?"

"Certainly not. He has been the victim of the plotters. I see it all now. But how did that pawn ticket come into his possession?"

"We'll find out. I believe Miss Good discovered it?"

"Yes."

"You can trust her?"

"As I would my own daughter, had I one. Indeed I love her no less than if she bore that relationship to me."

"Humph!"

"Surely you do not believe she was in league with that gang of plotters?"

"I didn't say so. But I want to talk to Mary Good. Please go and send her to me and tell her she can trust me fully."

Without a word of objection, Judge Gates complied.

Miss Good soon joined Nick.

He had taken advantage of his opportunities while on board the yacht to study the young lady at his leisure.

His verdict thereon had been made up some days before she stood before him in that pine tree grove on the coast of Maine.

It was this:

"Mary Good does not belie her name. Besides being very pretty and altogether attractive, personally, she is extremely intelligent, quick-witted, and possessed of strong prejudices.

"Her only fault is an inclination to be suspicious. That would be apt to lead her into a state of jealousy should her lover ever give her cause or the pretext of a cause."

Nick did not keep Miss Good long on a state of doubt as to his business with her.

"Miss Good," he began, "before I ask you to give me some information which I greatly desire to obtain, I will tell you that I am not what I pretend to be, but am a detective."

"Then what can you have to do with me?" she asked, rather coldly.

"Nothing, except to rely on you to help me do justice to one who has been very much wronged."

"Whom do you mean?"

"George Byron."

The young lady grew scarlet, and then her face became pale and grave.

"How can I aid you in righting Mr. Byron's wrongs?"

There was an icy hardness in her voice which Nick did not fail to observe.

"Before I answer that question I am going to tell you a few things which will astonish you."

Thereupon Nick hastily proceeded to reveal to her nearly all which he had related to Judge Gates. When he concluded, she said:

"It is almost too much for belief."

"But do you believe it, Miss Good?"

"I suppose I must."

"And consequently will agree that Byron was tricked."

"That does not necessarily follow. It may be that woman's confederate."

"George Byron may not be perfect character, Miss Good, but he is not capable of consorting with a woman of Mrs. Gates' class."

"Oh, you don't know him! He has secretly visited another woman, who may be equally as bad as Mrs. Gates."

"How do you know?"

She flushed again, but fearlessly replied:

"Because I saw him go to her flat."

"You followed him?"

"True."

"How did you first find out about the visits?"

"By a letter."

"From whom?"

"It was anonymously written."

"Humph! What else did it relate to you—this letter?"

"That he was losing much money at the race-track, and frequently pawned jewels to get money; that if I would search his clothes I'd probably find proof of it all."

"So you searched and found the pawn-ticket?"

"Yes, and followed him and found the woman he was visiting."

"What was her name?"

"Deiseull."

"What right had you to play spy on Mr. Byron?"

The unexpected question provoked her and threw her completely off guard. Before she could control her words, she hotly replied:

"The right of a wife, sir."

She bit her lip in chagrin, as Nick replied:

"So you and he were secretly man and wife. Well, I'm going to prove that he has been more worthy of your love than you have been worthy of his."

"Stop! What do you mean by that?"

"Simply this: You, through excessive jealousy, aided a lot of plotters in their attempt to deprive him of wealth, station, liberty, and even life itself."

She grew deadly pale and stifled a sob. She saw that he was driving conviction home to her heart.

After a slight pause she asked, in a tone which was full of pleading:

"What can I do to help you right those wrongs?"

"We must wait here on—Let us join the rest of the world. I think everything will yet come out all right."

"I can never forgive me," she sobbed.

"Yes, he will," encouraged Nick. "I'll see to it myself that he acts like a man, and he is every inch a man, I believe."

She merely whispered a "thank you," and meekly followed him back to the camp.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH EXPLAINS EVERYTHING.

Considerable excitement was aroused in certain circles when it was announced in the New York newspapers that the steam yacht *Merry Mermaid*, owned and commanded by Captain Rodman, had been run down at sea off the coast of Maine during a heavy fog, and lost with all on board but two.

Among the lost was Judge Gates, the retired millionaire of Fifth avenue, who, with his family and some servants, had chartered the yacht for a cruise.

The two survivors were Judge Gates' young and handsome wife and a sailor named Darley, to whom she owed her life. As the yacht was going down, he grasped her in one arm, and springing into the ocean, succeeded in swimming with her beyond the suction powers of the sinking yacht.

All the other passengers and crew, so far as Mrs. Gates knew, were lost.

Fortunately one of the yacht's small boats became detached from the wreck and floated, bottom side upward, to the struggling Darley, who succeeded in righting it.

In this they kept afloat until picked up by a lumberman's craft, and landed at a small town on the coast of Maine, whence they made their way back to New York.

Such was the surviving widow's story, corroborated by Darley, and it was generally believed.

There were a few, however, who waited a fortnight before giving up hope that some of the supposed victims would turn up.

At the end of a fortnight every hope

abandoned. Then Judge Gates' will was produced by his attorney, read, and published.

Thereby his nephew was cut off without a penny, and the entire estate was willed to his widow, Lucille Frederic Gates.

Those who expected to see young Byron come forward and assert his rights or dispute the will were disappointed.

Byron had disappeared as if he also was swallowed up by the sea.

The tongue of gossip wagged considerably because the young sailor who had rescued Mrs. Gates at the risk of his own life was a frequent visitor to the widow in her handsome residence on the avenue.

It became noised abroad that he was an old lover who had successfully schemed to get on the yacht so as to be near her, and when the accident occurred he was on hand to save her or go down with her in his arms.

Strange to say, nothing could be learned of the vessel which had destroyed the yacht.

It was, however, remembered that a similar accident had, a few years previously, occurred off Fire Island, and the offending vessel never was known.

One evening, nearly two weeks after Mrs. Gates' return, Darley made one of his frequent visits to the handsome widow.

He was followed, an hour later, by a second young man, who had run rather heavily up the front steps and rang the bell with a nervous air about him.

He must have been expected, for he was given almost immediate entrance.

The front door had hardly closed on him when he went approached the basement entrance, where Bridget, the girl who had

cooked for Judge Gates' household during the previous five years, met them.

Some low words passed between her and the men.

Then she barely suppressed a scream, and exclaimed:

"Mother of Moses save us! Are you a ghost?"

"No! no! Bridget. I am far from being a ghost. Let me in quick, and make no noise. I want to surprise her."

"Sure she'll drop dead with surprise," cried Bridget, as she hastened to let down the chain and open the area gate.

"If she doesn't, she certainly will display strong nerves," assented the second man, as he followed the first spokesman into the basement hall.

It is needless to say that the latter was Nick Carter, and that the man whom Bridget mistook for a ghost was Judge Gates himself.

Bridget's two visitors led her into the kitchen and closed the door.

Presently Bridget emerged and went up stairs.

Then there was a general collection of the other servants in the cook's domain.

After that Nick Carter came out alone and ascended the stairs.

He went noiselessly and without delay to the second floor.

At the head of the stairs he found the door of a room coming from a passage in the front of the house.

The door of this room opened from the hall on the side, and stood ajar.

For some reason the person in the room

It secure from interference or eavesdropping.

"Very careless of them, to say the least," muttered Nick to himself as he rapidly strode forward over the soft carpet in the hall.

In a few moments he was near enough to the door to hear the words of one of the inmates of the room.

It was a woman's voice.

She was saying:

"There can be not the least doubt in my mind that every soul on board the yacht perished. If I felt as sure about her there would be no cause for uneasiness whatever. We would be perfectly secure from all other sources of possible betrayal."

She was answered by a man's voice, which Nick knew was not Darley's:

"Oh, you have nothing to fear there, so long as you treat me squarely."

Then Darley's voice broke in:

"I suppose you've still got her hid on Fourth street, Percy?"

Percy's reply was a suppressed oath.

Mrs. Darley spoke up, severely:

"You never told me that you knew where she kept her."

"I just discovered it a day or so before we went on the yacht, and I had no chance to tell you while aboard; after that I forgot."

"Why did you not do it when I talked to you on the deck that night?"

"What night?"

"That night before we touched at Portland."

"Why what are you talking about. You

never spoke a word to me till the night of the—the accident."

"Look you, Bert Driscoll, I am not in the humor of joking. It is no time for such tomfoolery. You know we did meet that Tuesday night, and that I then told you about the time set for the destruction of the yacht."

"You told me all that in your note, Nette. It is you who seem to have lost your memory."

"My note? I wrote you a note?"

"Certainly. I happen to have it in my pocket now. Here it is."

There was a few moments of silence. Then the woman, in a choking voice, said:

"I never wrote that. It is a forgery."

"Nette! what are you saying!"

"I say it is a forgery. And you still persist that I did not discuss our plans with you three nights before the explosion while you were alone on the lookout?"

"I do. I was not on the lookout that night."

"My God!" gasped the woman. "There is treachery somewhere."

"That accounts for your supposed muddle of the proper course from the yacht to the island which kept us on the ocean till daylight."

"Yes, Rodman purposely deceived me. If any one on board the yacht knew of our plans beforehand, what right have we to believe that all perished?"

"Nonsense, except that we know the explosion occurred and was effected. We also know that the yacht was destroyed. Besides, the man I relieved drank coffee and was

know his condition. All the other members of the crew but me drank coffee, too."

"Well, I have proofs of the efficacy of the tea. Gates drank of it, and I could not possibly wake him before I went on deck to join you."

"Then, after all, everything may be all right."

"I don't understand it," muttered the woman, "for whoever it was I talked to on that Tuesday night he certainly heard me warn him to drink neither tea nor coffee for supper on the evening of Friday night following."

At this point a third voice—the voice of a man—broke in:

"Look here, my charming brace of plotters! Is this all got up for my benefit? What game of deception are you cooking this time to knock me out of my share?"

"There is no deception in it, Lloyd. If anybody is to be feared as a traitor it is you. That is your nature."

"Take care," he hissed.

"Now, don't you two go to raising a scene. Remember where you are and restrain your spats till we get well out of this."

"If we ever do get out of it. I tell you, Bert, I am dreadfully uneasy," declared the woman.

"Well, it seems to me that if anybody escaped from that yacht," said the man addressed as Bert, "he would have appeared before this. Why don't such person or persons appear if they are alive. Surely we've waited long enough."

Before either of the other two could reply, a whisper came from the open doorway:

"Everything comes to him who waits."

The three conspirators who were sitting near each other on the opposite side of the room sprang to their feet in concert.

"Who are you?" cried the woman, whose face had grown as white as the face of a dead person.

"I am Nick Carter, the detective," was the cool reply.

"Nick Carter! What do you want? What are you doing in this house?"

"I have come with news of the survivors of the Merry Mermaid."

The woman sank into her seat with a sound like a mixture of a shriek and a groan.

The man whom we have known as Darley took up the question of the hour, and boldly replied:

"There are no survivors of the Merry Mermaid."

"That's where you are mistaken, Mr. Darley. There are nothing but survivors. The yacht itself was the only victim of your infernal machine."

"It's a lie!" he gasped, showing that he had completely lost his nerve.

"Is it?" was the calm reply. "Well, I'll soon convince ever such a skeptical villain as you."

A shrill whistle rang out through the house, and in response the sound of many hurrying feet was heard.

The man addressed by Mrs. Gates and Lloyd was the first to recover his presence of mind.

With an oath, he sprang toward Nick, but when two ugly-looking pistols confronted him, he stopped and recoiled.

A moment later the three guilty plotters

in the room were confronted with the proofs of their doom.

Nick stepped into the room, and around him gathered Judge Gates himself, Mrs. Good and Mary Good. The two engineers of the Merry Mermaid, who were of course Chick and Patsy, still in the disguise they wore during the cruise, and Ida in her character of the stewardess.

Last of all appeared Captain Rodman himself.

In this instance it was the real Rodman in proper person.

He had read the report of the loss of the Merry Mermaid, and was about to make the particulars of Nick Carter's cruise known to the reporters when he received a telegram from Nick himself summoning him to New York and cautioning quiet.

"You will now perceive the uselessness of struggling further, I suppose," said Nick, addressing the three huddled plotters.

"I am only sorry that it is not in my power to produce the other victim of your devilish plot," he added, "but fortunately Lucille Frederic and her father alone, of all the married victims, paid the penalty with their lives."

"I know nothing about the fate of Lucille Frederic," declared Mrs. Gates, in a tone of desperation.

"That is true. But one of your confederates must say as much."

"If you mean me," said he who was known as Lloyd, "you are mistaken. Her life was too valuable to my villainous plans and to my enormous expectations."

"That is true?"

"True," he said, with emphasis to his

words, "I only wish I knew who killed her, for in spite of the coroner's verdict, I know she did not kill herself."

"I can gratify your desire in that direction. The girl did not commit suicide."

"No!" cried Darley, springing to his feet, pale to the lips, "George Byron killed her. There were proofs of his guilt. Where are they?"

"I have them, my dear sir—proofs which you were so careful as to 'plant.' But Heaven never lets the innocent suffer, nor the guilty escape. This little button is the real accuser."

Nick held aloft a smooth cloth-covered button.

"That was found in the room where Lucille Frederic was killed. It belongs to your vest, Darley, or whatever your name is. I have the vest here also," holding aloft that garment. "You left it carelessly behind when you deserted the doomed yacht. See the button and the place from which it was torn by the grasp of the dying girl; they belong to each other."

"So I am indebted to you for Lucille's death, am I?" muttered Lloyd, as he glared at the convicted assassin. "Well, you'll not kill another innocent girl."

Before anybody could interfere Lloyd leveled a large caliber pistol at Darley's breast, and there was a report which was fairly deafening.

Darley fell heavily to the floor, and Mrs. Gates sank back limp into her chair.

A second report rang out and Lloyd's body dropped upon the carpet.

He had turned his deadly weapon upon him-

self, and the second bullet passed through his own heart.

Percy was dead when his body was picked up from the floor, but Darley, it was found, still lived.

Mrs. Gates had merely fainted. She was soon revived and placed in custody.

Darley was removed to an upper room, and a surgeon called.

For several days his life hung in the balance, while he himself was conscious of his own critical condition.

When the surgeon finally gave up the case and told him he would have to die, he received the news cheerfully.

"Better so than the electric chair," he murmured.

Then came his confession, which cleared up all uncertain parts of the notable tragedy.

His name was Bert Driscoll. Mrs. Gates was his sister, and Percy Lloyd his half-brother.

All three lives the three had lived by their wits.

It was a kind of day to the once rich Colonel Frederic when Ninette Driscoll secured his employ as his private secretary.

Her object was to win her way to his heart, and to the final possession of his supposed fortune.

In this she failed. Then came Frederic's letter to Judge Gates and his confession that he had lost nearly all his possessions and was in danger of doing and leaving his daughter Lucille in poverty.

Ninette's plans were then changed.

Unknown to her, Ninette's two brothers had fallen in love with Lucille Frederic.

Only when the petted child played with

Percy did she know that the latter was capable of loving any woman.

The shock of his daughter's elopement killed Colonel Frederic. Four hours after he heard the news he was dead from apoplexy.

Then Ninette and Bert entered into a plot to secure Judge Gates' wealth, which plot was so nearly carried out to success.

Ninette felt certain that Lucille knew very little of Colonel Frederic's great friendship for Judge Gates, and after her fatal elopement would keep away from New York.

What was her surprise and consternation, therefore, to find, soon after her marriage to Judge Gates, that Percy was also in New York and had his wife somewhere in hiding.

Percy boldly sought out his brother and held the concealed Lucille as a weapon with which he extracted large sums of hush money. To raise this money, Mrs. Gates was forced to send her rubies, one by one, to Bert by use of the carrier pigeons.

It was Ninette who discovered Mary Good's relationship to George Byron and imparted the information to Bert.

By use of the carrier pigeons she sent to him two letters which she had taken from one of Byron's coat pockets.

The letters were tell-tale epistles from Mary. The envelopes of these two letters he had afterward used in trying to fix the crime of Lucille's death on Byron.

The accidental finding of Byron's lost pocket-knife in Percy's apartments one day had suggested that crime to Bert.

First, by the aid of his sister, he got a pawn ticket numbered in that same coat pocket and sent it to Mary Good, who was

On the day Lucille was murdered, fate played into his hands.

He made his first call on Lucille that night, having learned that Byron had a message to deliver to her from Percy.

He had no trouble in taking the defenseless woman's life without discovery, and, as he supposed, leaving no clew behind other than that which would convict Byron and also Percy as an accessory if the latter should confess to his relationship to her.

What happened is well known to our readers.

Mrs. Gates plead guilty to a charge of assault with intent to kill, and was sentenced to fifteen years in State's prison.

So grateful was Judge Gates at his escape from the plot of the Driscolls that he not only forgave George Byron, but settled upon him and Mary a large annuity to last during lifetime, and once more made his will in the young man's favor.

Then, too, he paid Rodman double the value of the Merry Mermaid, and saw to it that Nick Carter was amply compensated for the time spent and danger passed while the great detective was "at the wheel."

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "Nick Carter's Slippery Quarry; or, The Case Against 'Frisco Jim."

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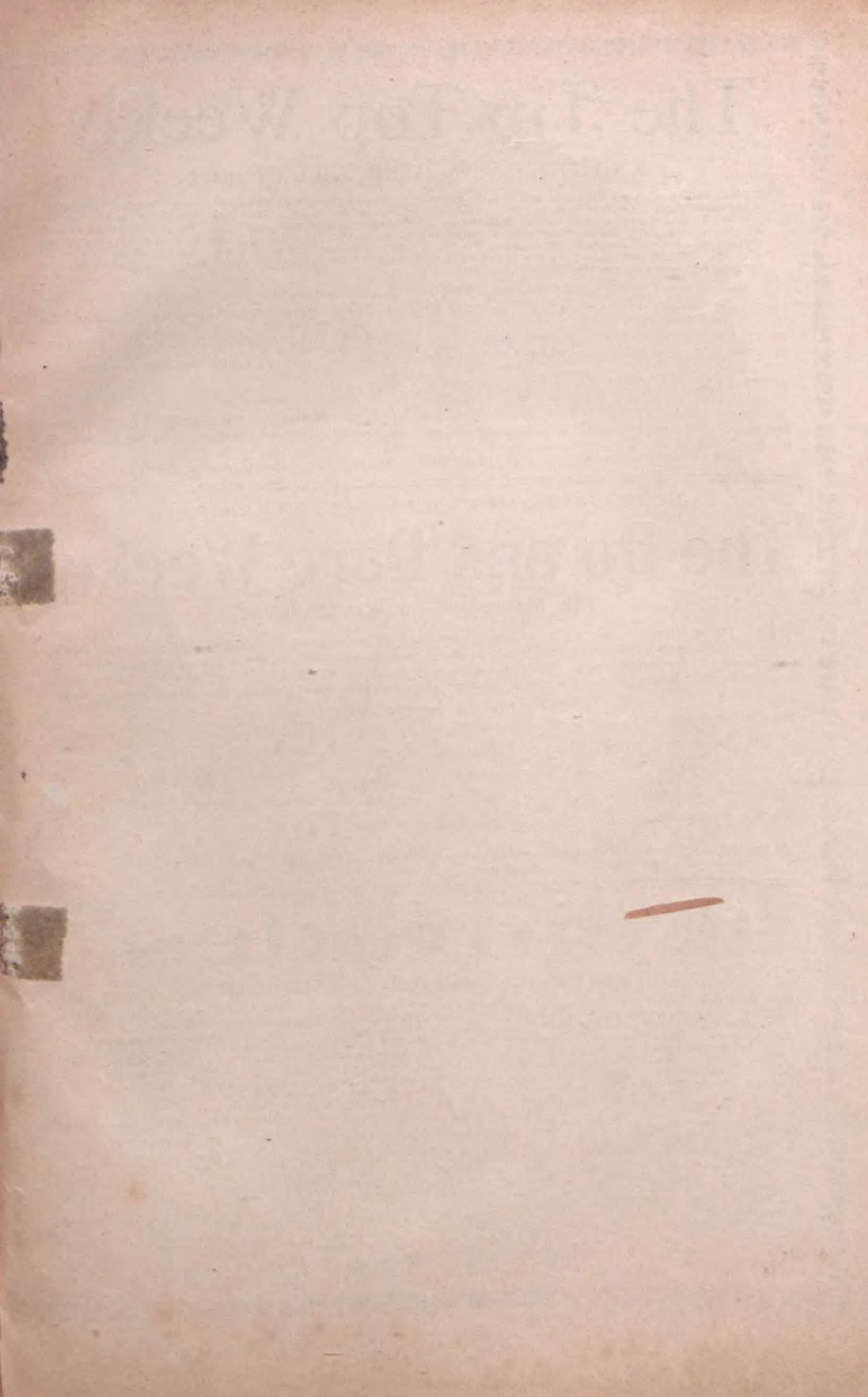
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